

FOREWORD

I was married to Nat Shapiro for more than five decades, and I should be able to say that I knew him inside-out.

I don't think this is so.

I say this because Nat was full of contradictions, of opposites. He was extremely hospitable and generous, and he had a terrific sense of humor, but he could also be gruff and authoritative. He loved the company of people, but he would argue for argument's sake about history, politics or art. He was an optimist and full of joy, but he was also a difficult person to reach as he did not like to share his inner feelings and thoughts.

Nat valued truth, justice, and integrity and he followed these tenets all through his life. But he was also restless and impulsive. When I shared my knowledge of European art, he couldn't resist the urge to go travelling in Europe, visiting places, monuments and museums from which he later drew inspiration. He had ambitious ideas; at one time wanting to buy a castle in ruins, in an almost unreachable corner of France, to make a hotel. He wanted to live new experiences, to taste new situations and above all to constantly search for the immense pleasure of creating. Sometimes, I had to keep our feet on the ground. He once wrote to a friend: "There is one aspect of life Mirella doesn't see and will never understand – you only go once around the clock."

What I did see was Nat's thirst for knowledge and I introduced him to classical music by taking him to Carnegie Hall, where he had never been. His mind was open to accept anything that was beautiful and with just one concert he was hooked. He had a very fine ear, and this music became another inspiration for his art: "Early on I wanted my work to duplicate the color and originality of Vivaldi's musical forms. Later it was J.S. Bach for structure."

But this was rare; Nat seldom talked about his art, his creative process or influences. He did not like to explain his paintings. He would just say: "Look at it. See in it what you want to see. Either you like it, or you don't. It's not necessary to know what I had in mind."

Nat once wrote to a friend about our marriage: "Believe it or not, after 50 years together we still do not understand each other." Maybe I did not completely understand him. But I embraced his contradictions. I do hope he knew how much I loved his artwork and the privilege I felt in being surrounded by his beautiful paintings.

As prolific and dedicated as he was, Nat had little interest in promoting himself as an artist. After he passed in 2005, I decided to promote his work and took the job willingly. In this book, I hope to bring Nat's art to the world. It's all here: his opposites, contradictions, humor and curiosity. The mood is never grim, it radiates joy; the various elements seem to be dancing, they are there to give pleasure.

Mirella Shapiro
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